

Soviets Blame Vilnius For Energy Clampdown

Gorbachev Warns Estonians, Latvians

By Michael Dobbs
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MOSCOW, April 19—The Kremlin formally announced today that it had cut supplies of oil and gas to Lithuania, accusing the rebel Baltic republic of ignoring an ultimatum by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to reverse its moves toward independence.

The Soviet president summoned the leaders of Estonia and Latvia, the two neighboring Baltic republics, to Moscow to warn them that they could face similar sanctions if they went ahead with unilateral measures to reassert their prewar independence. He demanded that Estonia abrogate a new law suspending the operation of Soviet legislation on Estonian territory.

The partial economic blockade of Lithuania began late Wednesday night when the Soviet Union cut off supplies of oil to the giant Mazeikiiai

refinery near the border with Latvia. Today the Kremlin tightened the noose by reducing supplies of natural gas more than 80 percent, leaving enough only for domestic use.

The Lithuanian authorities immediately imposed a series of draconian energy-saving measures, including the closing of several chemical plants that rely on natural gas and the rationing of gasoline for motorists. Domestic heating systems have also been switched off.

The imposition of economic sanctions appeared designed not only to punish Lithuania for its continued defiance of the Kremlin, but also to warn other Soviet republics of the dangers of taking the road toward full independence. In addition to the Baltic states, secessionists are also gaining strength in the southern republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

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as well as Moldavia and the western Ukraine.

In a statement after the oil embargo went into force, Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis accused the Soviet Union of resorting to "economic coercion and economic warfare" against a neighboring country. But he also described the decision as a recognition by the Kremlin of Lithuanian independence.

In Key Largo, Fla., President Bush said, "I am greatly concerned by this escalation in terms of using energy to push Lithuanians into line." Secretary of State James A. Baker III and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze spoke by telephone 20 to 30 minutes Wednesday night, Washington Post staff writer David Hoffman reported from Key Largo, where Bush met with French President Francois Mitterrand. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the United States has contacted its major allies about possible measures to respond to the Soviet energy squeeze.

Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene is on a four-day visit to Norway in an attempt to find alternative sources of energy. The Norwegian government has said it will allow Norwegian firms to sell oil to Lithuania at commercial rates, but does not so far appear to be willing to offer preferential credits.

Like most other Soviet republics, Lithuania has very limited reserves of freely convertible Western currencies. Until now, Lithuanian factories have been purchasing virtually all their oil from Soviet suppliers at a fraction of the world price.

Lithuanian Energy Minister Leontas Asmantas told a press conference in Vilnius tonight that the republic needs about 3.8 million barrels of oil a month.

Last week, Estonia and Latvia both signed an economic cooperation agreement with Lithuania, providing for mutual assistance in the event of emergencies. But the ability of the two other Baltic republics to help the Lithuanians is likely to prove limited, particularly at a time when they are also under pressure from Moscow to back down on their movement toward independence.